

Kevin Giles, *The Father and the Son: modern evangelicals reinvent the doctrine of the Trinity*, Zondervan, 2006.

Address given at the launch of Kevin Giles's book in Sydney,
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Introduction

In his book, Kevin Giles, otherwise known as Australo-Athanasius, or AA for short, reminds us that Augustine began to write his major work, *De Trinitate*, when he was a young man and finished it as an old man. When I began to read Kevin's book I was middle aged. By the time I had finished it, I had repeated much of my life, reviewed 2000 years of church history, and been swept up into the timeless embrace of the immanent Trinity. So I was by turns plunged into depression at the recollection of frustrated attempts to get the diocese to give the women a break, stimulated out of my tiny mind by the review of a philosophical exercise about the nature of God which has been likened to the intellectual achievement of landing humans on the moon, and even freed from the trammels of doctrinal disputation and ideological conflict, so that I was enabled to soar into the eternal wonder of uncreated love, only to find that I was made quite dizzy through being whisked around in the perichoretic dance.

So, it might take till your hair turns grey to finish Kevin's latest book, but paradoxically, if it doesn't kill you, it will keep you young. This book is huge. It is a prodigious effort, written by a genuine theologian. We don't have many of them in the Australian church. But of course it is not the first time in Church history that a theological *magnum opus* has been generated out of a local dispute among Christians. If nothing else comes of this dispute, we may be glad that it has generated a work of this erudition. But it is not nice being in dispute, when our Lord commanded us to be one, so let's see if we can seek the truth in love and not in acrimony. With that goal in mind, let me cover four matters:

1. The point at issue in this debate
2. The Historical context of the debate in Sydney
3. Kevin's contribution to the debate
4. An appeal to our opponents in this debate

The Point at Issue in this Debate

What is at stake here? According to Kevin, what is at stake is nothing less than our understanding of the nature of God – in particular the relation of the Father and the Son, and our understanding of the role of women in Christian ministry, and what the one has to do with the other. 'What divides evangelicals today,' writes Kevin, 'is whether women are permanently subordinated to men and whether the Son of God is eternally subordinated in function and authority to the Father' (48).

In this book, Kevin raises a number of questions. In what sense, if any, is the Son *eternally* subordinated to the Father? Is the sense of the Son's subordination held by those who insist on role subordination by women in the Christian ministry threatening to take us outside the bounds of Christian orthodoxy? Are the opponents of women's ordination fighting with weapons forged by Arius, the theologian who gave his name to a movement made up of all the theologians from post-apostolic times who eternally subordinate the Son to the Father? Does the subordination of the Son in role and/or authority effectively undermine the equality or oneness of being which the Son has with the Father, for if one is eternally subordinate in role or authority, isn't one less than God? And how can one who is less than God be our Saviour? Is the current subordinationist

view of socially conservative evangelicals constructed in response to the need to bulwark the major theological issue of the day, namely the permanent subordination of women? If so, would not that easily corrupt the doctrine? (44).

Of course, we are all corrupt, and opponents of the ordination of women contend that its supporters do exactly the same thing – they want to find in the relations within the Trinity an equality which supports role equality between men and women.

When I reflected on this in the light of Kevin's book I found myself wondering if that is exactly what we did in Sydney when we fought for the ordination of women in the crucial years 1996 to 1998. So, I'll move out of theology into my comfort zone for a while if I may and go over this history. Kevin invited James McPherson to launch his book to the sound of a theological trumpet and me to launch it with an historical trumpet.

The Historical context of the debate in Sydney

Those of you who long for peace in this matter will be thrilled to learn that all Sydney Anglicans believe in the ordination of women: it's just that some of us believe in the ordination of women to the priesthood while the rest believe in the sub-ordination of women to men.

During the debates on the ordination of women its supporters, not its opponents, were the ones who first raised the matter of its analogy to the Trinity. This was at the special Synod Conference which was held, appropriately enough, at Trinity Grammar School on 16 May 1998. You will recall that the decision to ordain women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church was made in most Australian dioceses in 1992. From 1993 to 1995 we were not allowed to debate the matter in the Sydney synod: there was a three-year moratorium on the debate. Then we had three years of debates over Justice Keith Mason's proposal to allow ordination to the priesthood without headship of a congregation, a sort of subordination ordination. But the opponents saw even this proposal as the thin end of the wedge and said 'no', not by much in the house of laity, but by a considerable margin in the house of clergy. So Harry Goodhew convened the Trinity school conference. Harry was distressed by the division the matter was causing, and, it was perceived, he was not as impressed by the arguments against female ordination as its opponents thought he should be as the one who had to safeguard the diocesan heritage. He invited synod members to meet and consider two pre-circulated papers, one for and one against female ordination.¹

The pro-case was beautifully written – by me. It was entitled 'Not Compromise; Not Uniformity; But Liberty: A Case for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood'. It was there that the issue of the relevance of the subordination of the Son in the Trinity was first raised in a synod debate with reference to female ordination. I have on my computer three drafts of this paper. The first is dated the 4th of April; the second 22nd April and the third, the 27th of April. Not until the last draft did the Trinity get a mention. In the first, there appears the claim that the 'biblical texts bearing on this matter are more supportive of a partnership model of ministry than a subordination model'. In the second that had matured into the claim that 'The creation texts in Genesis are more supportive of a partnership model of ministry than a subordination model'. But then in the third, the

¹ We then broke into discussion groups and addressed this question which was devised by the Archbishop: "We are faced in our diocese and synod with a serious division of opinion over whether or not there should be included amongst the many ministries exercised in the Church by women, the opportunity to fulfil the ministry of presbyter. Can you conceive of any generally acceptable approach to this question that would satisfy the convictions of both groups, and relieve the synod of the prospect of regularly debating bills calculated to make such ministry possible or to rescind such bills?"

Trinity is invoked. I remember my surprise at the advent of this argument. It came from Bill Lawton with the support of John MacIntyre, both of whom were to speak so movingly at the special synod. So I might have written the document, but I did it with Bill Lawton guiding the pen, and John MacIntyre, patting Bill on the back. You see it was the product of an undivided trinity, with my pen humbly subordinated to the other two with whom I was not the ontological equal. This is something of what we said:

The language of 1 Corinthians 11.11,12 is unequivocal. . . . Paul argues no priority of male or female and no subordination, only a fundamental equality. Verse 11 specifies a necessary interdependence of male and female.

This is all consistent with Paul's idea of headship which is based on his understanding of the Godhead. That God is the head of Christ means that the Son is 'eternally begotten of the Father', or 'of the same stuff as' and therefore equal to God. By analogy, the female is 'of the same stuff as' and therefore equal to the male. For, in creation, God made us human, male and female. There is no order of subordination in this understanding of headship. In fact, the opposite is true: there is an explicit order of creation which gives equality of status to male and female.

When Paul speaks of Christ's headship, as in Ephesians, he means not the authority of Christ in the Church, but the unity Christ gives the Church. In the Church all stand equal in status before God precisely because, all have their origin 'in Christ' — have Christ as their head. Headship has nothing to do with the authority of one over another, nor of the subordination of one to the other: it is about our completion in Christ and therefore our unity.

No passage of Paul's writings should be read to construe an order of subordination of females to males. . .

And then comes the paragraph which started it all:

Such a reading of the Bible is consistent with the Church's ancient formularies. The Athanasian Creed specifies that there is no ordered subordination or hierarchy within the Godhead. The only stated subordination is that Jesus is 'inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood'. Headship within the Trinity cannot mean 'subordinate to' or 'under the authority of'. Subordination is a matter of the freedom of the will, not of some imposed order: it is voluntary and mutual, and, for us in the Church, it is 'out of reverence for Christ'.

It is with the help of Kevin's book, that I can now exegete this paragraph at least so that it makes sense to me, and I concede that it makes sense to me for the first time. I did not know what it meant when I wrote it at Bill's behest. In this statement on the Trinity prepared for the special ordination debate synod, we claimed that,

- first, in the Athanasian Creed there is no subordination or hierarchy within the Godhead, and therefore if there is any analogy between members of the Trinity and the relationship between men and women it cannot be one which justifies the subordination of men to women.
- We also claimed second that the only sense in which Jesus was subordinate to the Father was in respect to his manhood, that is, not his divinity, that is not eternally, so the temporary subordination of the Son for our salvation, cannot be made the foundation for the permanent subordination of women under men.

- And we claimed, third, that the Son's subordination in his earthly ministry was not imposed on him, but was a matter of his own free will, and that it cannot therefore be made a mandatory expectation of women that they must submit to male authority in the church.

Now I have confessed that when I wrote these words dictated to me by Bill and John I did not know whether all this was right or not. I must say that I got the distinct impression that our opponents did not know either. They seem to have been genuinely surprised and disconcerted by this argument. It was because of their surprise that I found myself wondering if we, the proponents for the ordination of women, started this rather unholy row about the Holy Trinity.

And I do think one of the main lessons to be drawn from the whole business in general and Kevin's book in particular is that one should be very careful with applying to our own social world and our human relationships any insights we might have into the inner life of the Trinity. Analogies between us and the Trinity too easily become vehicles for pushing our own views about how humans, men and women, should relate to each other.² I notice that one reviewer of Kevin's book, the American scholar, Phillip Cary, Professor of Philosophy at Eastern University, who has written a very favourable review of this book, strongly recommends us to avoid such analogies altogether. Kevin does not do that – there are occasional analogies between us and the Trinity which Kevin touches on in his book (eg.51, 312). The possibilities are too rich to forsake such an enterprise, but Kevin does recommend and practise caution, and in particular he catalogues the problems for those conservative evangelicals who seek to shape our understanding of the husband/wife relationship according to the divine Father/Son relationship (66):

The analogy is not a good fit. The husband-wife relationship is twofold; trinitarian relations are threefold. The husband-wife relationship is a male-female relationship; the divine Father-Son relationship is depicted analogically as a male-male relationship. The husband-wife relationship anticipates offspring; the divine Father-Son relationship does not. Why the Father-Son relationship should inform the human husband-wife relationship is thus not logically clear. There seems to be a slip in the argument somewhere. If anything you would think the divine Father-Son relationship would inform. . . the human father-son or father-child relationship.

I wrote in the margin at that point EXACTLY.

Anyway, I found myself wondering if we, the supporters of the ordination of women, had not practised enough caution and that we had actually started it. If we did start it, we really started something. What happened next may be gleaned from Kevin's book in many places, but it is succinctly outlined and analysed, with what I would characterize as courageous, saddened concern, by Bishop Tom Frame. His important account 'The Dynamics and Difficulties of Debate in Australian Anglicanism' is in a book of essays in honour of Bruce Kaye, who has done more than most for the peace of the Church.³

In brief, the diocesan Doctrine Commission got busy. They started like the Council of Trent, unsure if Luther's doctrine of justification by faith was right or not, but, for the most part, sure that they wanted to conclude that it was not right. The next year, 1999, they produced their report 'The Doctrine of the Trinity and Its Bearing on the

² Telling women, for example, they should submit to men just as Jesus submitted to the Father does not work because Jesus did not have to be told.

³ Tom Frame and Geoffrey Treloar, *Agendas for Australian Anglicanism: Essays in Honour of Bruce Kaye* (Adelaide: ATS Press, 2006), 142-159.

Relationship of Men and Women.’ Kevin responded with his first *magnum opus* on this subject *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (IVP, 2002). Here Kevin did not charge the Doctrine Commission’s report with heretical subordinationism, but he did suggest that it was trending in that direction.

The Anglican Primate, Peter Carnley, however, did not hesitate to claim that it had indeed reached this destination. Now, candidly, it seems unlikely that history will adjudge this to have been the objective claim of the detached scholar. He had already contracted the common virus which might go by the name of ‘sore-with-Sydneyitis’. His article in the *Bulletin*, just before Easter 2000, on the resurrection had led some Sydney churchmen to impugn his orthodoxy and to campaign for the boycotting of his installation on 30 April 2000 as Primate. Archbishop Harry Goodhew was petitioned not to permit the installation service at St Andrew’s Cathedral or, if it did go ahead, to absent himself from it.⁴

Peter Carnley can hardly have enjoyed the Sydney assault on his orthodoxy. Nobody ever does, I guess. Instead of turning the other cheek, he returned the cheek. In his 2004 book, *Reflections in Glass*, he accused the Doctrine Commissioners in their report on the Trinity of falling into ‘the ancient heresy of Arianism’.⁵ The media rejoiced. Peter Jensen, by then Archbishop, did not. But he undertook to reconvene the Sydney Doctrine Commission to consider the Primate’s charge and to revise the report if error could be detected.

This was getting serious. The two Petrine Archbishops were in danger of falling out of fellowship with each other. Peter Jensen was doubly pained. Not only did Carnley accuse him and the members of the doctrine commission of Arianism, but he accused the revered Moore College principal, T C Hammond, of the same error. In his neat summary of the components of the doctrine of the Trinity in the influential *In Understanding be Men*, Hammond had listed (a) the unity of the Godhead, (b) the full deity of the Son, and (c) the ‘subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father’ (38). Kevin commented on this in a footnote in his earlier book,⁶ not attaching much importance to it at the time. But Carnley made much of this, suggesting that Hammond was an Arian. This surely is making far too much of too little. Hammond’s reference is half a line long. It is impossible to be sure of what he meant by it. But that was not Peter Jensen’s objection. He is a bishop. The job of a bishop is to defend the deposit of faith, including those in the Sydney evangelical tradition who were the honoured defenders of that same deposit. As an historian I do not object to this. Peter Jensen is a good historian, and everything he writes on our Christian heritage is welcome as far as I am concerned. But there are those, and Carnley is one of them, who refuse to accept a theologian’s word just because he is a revered evangelical scholar. Anyway, Peter Jensen rejected Carnley’s construction in a lecture delivered in Ireland in June 2005. It was entitled ‘Caleb in the Antipodes: The Search for the Historical Hammond’. And Peter said:

To Arianise Hammond is to say that the Intervarsity movement, the Diocese of Sydney and evangelicals everywhere, have been instructed in doctrine by an Arian theologian for seventy years. Indeed, given the influence of Hammond in Ireland

⁴ Harry responded:

Consistency would dictate to me that if I chose to boycott this service I would need to do the same with the meetings of the General Synod and its Standing Committee and with the Bishop’s Conference: Archbishop Peter chairs all these in his role as Primate. This would be tantamount to severing episcopal relationships with the Australian Church. That is not something I wish to do at this point in time.

⁵ Peter Carnley, *Reflections in Glass* (Pymble: Harper Collins, 2004), 234f.

⁶ 75n.

and England long before he came to Australia, you could say for almost one hundred years.

Let me hasten to say that the Sydney Doctrine Commission gave careful consideration to these charges, and rejected them decisively. The use of the word 'subordination', carefully nuanced, although unusual in recent theology is one easy enough to establish in classical theology over the years, as, more importantly, is the doctrine of the eternal obedience of the Son, or the asymmetrical relationship of Son and Father. It is the egalitarian theologians who are more prone to innovation, and in greater danger of error.⁷

Well, Kevin looks again at Hammond in this latter book. He is surprised by Hammond's reference to subordination. Hammond neither signposts its coming nor justifies it. Kevin does not suspect that Hammond was an Arian. He suggests that he might have been just speaking of the 'temporal subordination' of the work of both the Son and the Spirit for our salvation.⁸ But Kevin argues that what Hammond does not do is offer support for the Grudem line, that is, the combination of the Son's equality of being with the Father with his subordination to the Father in his role. That, Kevin insists, is an invention of the 1970s, and it was invented in response of the need to admit that women are equal in a non-patriarchal world, but to keep them subordinate anyway.

The nadir of the whole affair was probably reached at a public colloquium in Melbourne on 20 August 2004 when Peter Adam, Principal of Ridley College, observed that the Primate's accusations had spread 'ill-will and resentment'. Kevin expressed his frustration that Peter Adam was not addressing 'the central issue in contention', and Peter responded by claiming that whether or not the Diocese of Sydney was Arian was 'a significant enough issue'.⁹

It has been a robust affair. And Kevin has had to be robust to survive in it.

But before turning to Kevin, let me answer finally the question I have asked often enough: did we, the supporters of the ordination of women, start it all? Happily, we are not that significant. Kevin's book has put the Sydney debate into a wider context. There was, Kevin argues, since the 1970s (66) a new evangelical fashion, laying claim to orthodoxy, that women were equal to men in being, but subordinate in role and authority. We, the supporters of female ordination in the 1990s, had sought to refute that in our exegesis of the texts favoured by those who wanted to keep women in subordinate roles. It was only a matter of time before we would have to do what the subordinationists, mainly conservative American evangelicals, were already seeking to do, namely arguing their case within the analogy of the Trinity. So let me repeat what I said to my own mother 50 years ago with reference to another matter, 'I didn't start it. He hit me first.'

Kevin's contribution to the Debate

Kevin is a theologian. There are many different types of theology: pastoral, spiritual, systematic, biblical, historical, and polemical. Kevin's book is an exercise in systematic, biblical, historical, and polemical theology. His opponents, no doubt, will comment on its polemics. James McPherson will address the theology. Let me make a few comments on the history.

⁷ Caleb in the Antipodes - Peter Jensen *the TC Hammond lecture presented by Archbishop Peter Jensen during his trip to Ireland in June 2005*, Posted on 14/09/2005 (www.sydneyanglicans.net/indepth/caleb_in_the_antipodes_peter_jensen)

⁸ One might suspect that Hammond does not spell this out because he thinks it too obvious and orthodox to demand proof. No-one was contesting it then.

⁹ Frame, 155.

As a result of the breadth of his historical survey, Kevin questions a number of evangelical shibboleths about the use and interpretation of the Bible and its relation to tradition.

First comes his observation on how we should use the Bible in formulating doctrine. There is no revealed *doctrine* of the Trinity, Kevin reminds us (13). We are talking here about human constructs to explain the triunity of God.

Similarly, we can use no Scripture bearing on this subject free from the interpretation we put upon it. There are only good, bad and indifferent interpretations (43), but it is always interpretation. He dismisses those who argue against him by asserting that they are using biblical arguments and he is not. Rather, Kevin points out, they are using their interpretation of the Scriptures and he is using his interpretation. Admittedly, he is using the interpretations of the Fathers, or more precisely his interpretation of the interpretation of the Fathers, as the best guides to the tradition of the Church. We post-moderns would say that their interpretation is as valid as any. Kevin suggests that they are better than most. But all our interpretations are influenced by the culture of the communities in which we have lived. 'No theologian,' writes Kevin (68), 'following the direction of his own compass would ever have found by himself what he now confesses and defends on the ground of Holy Scripture.' There is no preconceptionless reading of the Scriptures or of any other historical document.

Having questioned that sacred cow, he does not hesitate to question another. The Reformers did not mean by *Sola Scriptura* that the Bible alone gave the answer to every question (71), that it was self-interpreting, and that the interpretations of others are of no value. That slogan asserted the supremacy of Scripture over tradition, not its elimination of tradition.¹⁰ So the issue, according to Kevin is (73) that 'One group of evangelicals is saying on their reading of the Bible the Son is *not* eternally subordinated to the Father in being, function, or authority; and the other side is saying on their reading of the Bible the Son *is* eternally subordinated in function, authority, and – possibly for some – in being as well.' And he comes to the belief, courageous for an evangelical, that 'the best guide available for a right reading of Scripture, especially in regard to the Trinity and Christology, is the tradition' (74).

Furthermore, Kevin insists that 'Quoting texts cannot resolve complex theological debates'¹¹ He observes that there are two different ways of reading both the bible and the great works of theology on which the Christian tradition is based. We can read them looking for texts to support our preconceived notion, or we can read them to find out what the author really meant. It is difficult for theologians on either side of the debate to refrain from the former and practise the latter, but true scholarship demands it.

On the basis of those insights, based on his own survey of primary sources, and not on ideas found in secondary sources, Kevin arrives at a number of interesting historiographical findings about the debate on the eternal subordination of the Son.

Most fundamentally, Kevin's belief is that, if you read what theologians, past and present, have written on this subject with a view to identifying their real intent as distinct from occasional texts along the way, you will find that, even if they occasionally write things which are compatible with eternal subordinationism, what is normally meant is divine

¹⁰ Just as *homo unius libri*, a man of one book applied to John Wesley, does not mean that Wesley read only the Bible. He read everything. It was just that the Bible was supreme in its authority over every other book.

¹¹ Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2002), 3

differentiation or order within the Trinity, without any intention of implying subordination (91). If that is true, it is a major finding.

Most theologians, Kevin has discovered, if they affirm functional subordination (as the recent conservative evangelicals do) also affirm ontological subordination, that is, subordination in being, (which the recent conservatives do not do). The conservatives, by contrast with most theologians, combine eternal functional subordination with ontological equality. That, too, is a major finding.

Kevin says two things about this combination of eternal subordination in function with equality of being:

1. It is a very recent (post 1970) invention. If this is true, it, too, is a very significant finding. Kevin lays it at the door of George Knight and Wayne Grudem. The latter is the best known American evangelical champion of the role subordination of women to men. Hierarchy in the Trinity justifies gender hierarchy. In Grudem's thought, women are not inferior to men. They are equal. They just have different roles. One such role is to submit to the headship of men, just as the Son submits to the headship of the Father. So women are equal, but in the hierarchy they are below men.¹²

2. The second point that Kevin makes about eternal role subordination combined with ontological equality is that it is wrong. It is wrong because it is illogical, and because it is illogical, it is impossible (57). If the Son is eternally subordinated in function and cannot be otherwise, then, of necessity, he IS ONTOLOGICALLY unequal to the Father. Subordinating the eternal role or authority of the Son to that of the Father makes the Son a subordinate being, because one is what one does (41). Kevin's opponents accuse him of arriving at this conclusion by using reason rather than revelation. It is a philosophical and theological argument, and not an historical one. But it is surely a very interesting argument which commands respect.¹³

Kevin contends that this eternal role subordination is not only new, but, and this is his major historical claim, it is a departure from and inconsistent with historic orthodoxy. This is the charge which his critics will take most exception to. Kevin acknowledges (75) that 'Judging when a formulation of the Trinity has moved outside the bounds of orthodoxy is not easy', but contends that the conservative evangelical model of the Trinity in which the Son is subordinated to the Father in authority does move 'outside the circle of orthodoxy' (75) and heads off in the direction of erroneous subordinationism. It might help his opponents if they think of this as an historical claim rather than some abstract claim to eternal truth. Kevin is challenging his readers to assess the validity of his claim that most theologians, whom the church has determined are orthodox, reject any form of eternal subordination of the Son. There is little point in responding to this emotionally. It is either right or it is not.

All the great theologians of the church, Kevin argues in detail, from Paul to the present deny this eternal subordination. His book consists of a number of related propositions which he then reviews in the light of the works of these theologians: Biblical writers, the Fathers, the Reformers, the Evangelicals, and the leading Protestant and Catholic

¹² The Pro-ordinationists would observe that this is a strange form of equality. Men would be more inclined to call this equality than would women. The anti-ordinationists would retort: 'Don't be so worldly in your thinking.'

¹³ Kevin adds persuasively (59): 'To speak of the *voluntary* and *temporal* 'functional or role subordination' of the work of the Son in the work of salvation is acceptable, but the minute the word *eternal* is introduced, a profound theological error is embraced. . . His subordination defines his person. As the Son he is subordinated to the Father – subordinated in his person or *being*. Millard Erickson agrees. He says, 'A temporal, functional subordination without inferiority of essence seems possible, but not an eternal subordination'.

theologians of the twentieth century.¹⁴ And the result, as I have said, is a number of major historical findings which are very original because they are mined out of primary sources, not just repeated from secondary ones.

One of the most interesting parts of the book is the sixth chapter, 'Differentiating the Trinitarian Persons'. Kevin makes two big historical observations here. First, those such as Athanasius who are most interested in denying subordinationism, are most given to stressing the unity within the Trinity. They do not deny the differentiation of the three persons, but they are differentiated by identity rather than functionally, that is the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father and neither is the Spirit and the Spirit is neither of them. The differentiation by identity (and also by origination¹⁵ and relationship¹⁶) stresses more the distinctive persons rather than the differences in the things which they do. Those who are most interested in affirming the differentiation of the persons assert that **the chief point** of differentiation is that the Son is subordinate to the Father in authority and function: the Father sends; the Son goes; the Father commands; the Son obeys. That is the most identifiable distinction between the Father and the Son.

Kevin does not go into this, but one could reflect on the analogy between these divine persons differentiated most distinctively by subordination and the differentiation between men and women. What is the chief difference between a man and a woman? Now that difference is pretty important to most of us. We really like that difference. We could say a lot about that. Said Jonathan Edwards, my favourite theologian, 'How greatly are we inclined to the opposite sex'. What is it which makes them 'opposite' which so excites us? According to this analogy, the most exciting thing for men about women is that women are subordinated. According to this analogy, the only one point of difference worth observing is that men command; women obey; men rule; women submit. That's an exciting difference, isn't it? That's a real turn on. Picture with me two guys at the pub, discussing their women. One says to the other, 'I cannot get her out of my mind. She is just so subordinate.' Another failed analogy, methinks.

Quo Vadis? An Appeal to our opponents in theological Debates

¹⁴ The Apostle Paul 'knew nothing of a functionally subordinated Christ after Easter' (105). The entire Bible shows the Father, Son and HS functioning as one in equipping the church for ministry. There is no functional subordination in the Trinity now. The obedience of Jesus is initiated at his incarnation and culminates and terminates at the cross. After the resurrection, it is equality of function and authority as it is of being.

Kevin's hero is Athanasius: 'What characterises his writings is a constant appeal to Scripture and a complete rejection of any suggestion whatsoever that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father in being, work, or authority.' (83)

In Augustine's rule of canonical interpretation was that all the texts which speak of the subordination of the Son are with reference to his being 'in the form of a servant', that is to his temporary status during the incarnation, while all the texts which speak of his equality with God are with reference to his being 'in the form of God' (85)

Kevin maintains that the Calvinists, including Calvin himself, Jonathan Edwards and Warfield all reject subordinationism 'in any form' (34)¹⁴

Warfield gives the orthodox evangelical view when he insisted that the subordination of the Son came to an end on the cross and is not to be **read back** into the 'eternal modes of subsistence', (39) that is, the eternal being of the Son in the immanent Trinity is not to be understood as subordinated to the being of the Father, nor, one suspects if it were to have become relevant at the beginning of the twentieth century, was it to be **read forward** into the eternal subordination of women to men.

¹⁵ The Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten, the Spirit proceeds.

¹⁶ The Father is the Father of the Son, the Son is the Son of the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Father or the Father and the Son.

I would like to turn now to answering this question: How would I like to see those who have been his opponents in this controversy respond to his latest book? Repent, admit that they are wrong, and ordain women immediately and make them bishops tomorrow? Well, some of us would. But I imagine that Kevin's opponents will not be persuaded by his latest book any more than they were by his first. And even if they were, that is not the main thing I would like to see. We have such a problem here, that a number of solutions have already been suggested. Our opponents speak of the rules of Godly debate. Tom Frame suggests the provision of new structures to handle the disputes. Neither is likely to succeed. I want to suggest another which is even less likely to succeed, namely, throughout the dispute we must continue to love one another and maintain our relationship, and when in doubt, communicate. This is impossible without the grace of God, but why are we interested in doing anything without the grace of God? I would like to see us be gracious with one another. So, by way of conclusion, a few utopian principles which have congealed in my mind as I have worked through Kevin's book:

1. I would like to see us graciously seek first to learn from each other, and seek to understand each other, before we decide to disagree with each other. I would like Kevin's opponents to read his book and understand its argument before condemning it. We should look first for what is true in what Kevin affirms rather than looking for the flaws in the argument.

You would have to be very hard-hearted not to learn heaps from Kevin's book. But you will learn nothing if you are motivated only by the desire to prove it wrong. Recently I attended a seminar on early Islamic reactions to Christianity. Apparently during the 10th and 11th centuries, the highpoint of Muslim/Christian dialogue, Muslims were curious about Christian doctrine, but they were also motivated by a desire to refute Christians – so there was a conflict within the Muslim approach, a conflict between the desire to satisfy one's curiosity about another religion and the emotional need to establish that the other religion is wrong. Their interest in Christian doctrines was real, but it was not equal to the desire to establish that these doctrines were wrong. The consequence has been appalling. Maybe approaching any work of theology primarily motivated by a desire to refute it is destructive of truth and love.

2. In our disagreements, I would like to see us play the ball and not the man.

Let's not just dismiss Kevin's book on the grounds that he is obsessed by this issue. Of course he is. That is why he was able to write such a whopping great book in such a short time in such a busy life. Ad hominem attacks are not likely to do anything but provoke yet another book. So please don't attack him. Let us, with maturity, accept what Kevin says on p.70, 'One of the painful things evangelicals must honestly face is that a high view of biblical authority does not necessarily lead to unanimity in doctrine.' We Evangelicals need to learn from the founders of our movement, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards in this respect. Both had very high views of biblical authority. Zeal for the truth, contended Edwards, is an expression of divine love, but only if 'it is against *things*, and not *persons*'.¹⁷ I reminded Peter Jensen of this in an important conversation (important for me, that is) over our differences and the strain that it had caused in our relationship. He said that, unlike us, Wesley and Edwards were great men. I replied, 'Yes, but we are meant to learn from great men'. I thought at the time that I had won that exchange, but on reflection, Peter was wiser to emphasise how hard this is. Nevertheless, we cannot give up on something because it is hard.

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol.2 (New Haven: Yale University Press 1959): 353.

3. In our disputes, I would like to see us maintain our fellowship with those who differ from us. Let us not be so happy just to move on and leave each other behind.

I hear people say about the ordination of women, or rather the lack of it. 'All the interest has gone out of the debate. We have moved on.' Well, all the interest has gone out of the debate on Aboriginal reconciliation, too, but we have not moved on. We are all left with a feeling of anxiety, or at least unease, on that score. We are not addressing the issue of aboriginal reconciliation, that is true, but let us not kid ourselves that we can move on until we do. Similarly, we have not moved on within the Anglican Church in Sydney on gender issues. Gender was one of the defining debates in Australian society in the 1980s and 1990s. The interest has gone out of that, because the feminists have made such progress. Australia has moved on with more empowered women. But in the Church, all too many Australian women have moved out, and we in the Church have been left behind. But that not all the interest has gone out of the debate by those who claim to have moved on is evidenced by the fact that the disputation over the Trinity continues. That has not been resolved.

4. Let us honour the hard work of those who contend for the truth even if we disagree with them.

We have come here tonight to congratulate Kevin on his massively researched study of the Trinity published by a very respectable American publisher of quality evangelical Christian literature. I hope no-one who has not had a book published by such a publisher will write a review declaring that this is not a good book. In a move of Athanasian proportions, Kevin has single-handedly, regained the theological high ground in this issue of the ordination of women and the subordination of the Son. In the synod debates in Sydney, it was my impression that we supporters of women's ordination were fairly comprehensively defeated on theological and Biblical grounds, not because those grounds are weak, but because most of us were not great at marshalling the arguments. Kevin's treatment not only does that, but addresses comprehensively the far more critical matter of the eternal relations between members of the Trinity.¹⁸ It is the importance of the subject matter, and the clarity and the originality of Kevin's findings, which guarantee that it will attract the attention of theologians and lesser mortals like us for a long time to come. It goes out with his prayers and ours that it will honour the holy Trinity, and, with the hope, that the dust will settle soon, and that we will all come to appreciate that the great point of differentiation in the Trinity is that it makes love possible. Love must have an object for it to be love, and we must maintain our relationships if we are to express the grace and love which are the sole evidences that the Kingdom is among us.

Stuart Piggin 20 June 2006

¹⁸ . It is a treatment which gives increasing confidence that he has an explanation which rings true because it sounds a clear note on every part of the problem. For example, any of you who have any knowledge of how theologians between Augustine and Anselm thought will be impressed by Kevin's treatment of 'Order' on pp.48-50. In using the word 'order', translating the Greek *taxis*, with reference to the relations of the members of the Trinity, these theologians did not mean, as the Sydney conservatives have claimed, hierarchy or sub-ordering. The Arians used the word that way, but the pro-Nicene theologians used it to mean that which was 'fitting'. We are talking here about relations between members of the Trinity which is fitting, a 'suitable disposition' between the members. It is an unusual way to think, but it was a very common way of thinking by such theologians. To give an example, mercifully absent from Kevin's book, the virgin birth of Jesus was supported by the claim that it is fitting. God made a human without a man or a woman, namely Adam. He made a human with a man and without a woman, namely Eve, and he made humans with men and women, namely most of us, so it is only fitting that he should make a human with the only other option left, namely with a woman and without a man. That was only fitting. Kevin's treatment of 'fittingness' is of a piece with the careful treatment of the many technical terms employed in the debate.